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## EDUCATION AND CRIME.

MUCH comment has been occasioned by an article in a recent number of the *North American Review*, written by Rebecca Harding Davis, in which she makes some sharp and caustic remarks about the relations of education and crime. The writer takes a very doleful view of the matter, and by reference to the number of persons in jail able to read and write attempts to prove that education has served to increase the amount of crime. She even goes so far as to intimate that the graded schools are breeding places for crime, and explains the large number of old maids in New England and other portions of the country as the natural result of their disinclination to marry men of moderate means after having received an academic course of instruction.

The article is a forceful one and has caused widespread notice and criticism. While many people disagree with Mrs. Davis in her gloomy conclusions, no facts have been produced to disprove her contentions. Commissioner of Education Harris, however, is prepared to take issue with her, and in an interview with the *Eagle* correspondent today he presented an array of arguments and statistics on the opposite side. He believes that Mrs. Davis has made her assertions without a fair and full consideration of all the features of the case and is not willing to admit that education helps to increase the total number of pickpockets, forgers, or other criminals. When Commissioner Harris was asked today what he had to say of the statement of Mrs. Davis that our graded schools are breeding houses of crime, he replied :

If the statistics on both sides of this question are considered, I think most people will believe our schools do not swell the number of criminals of the country, but, on the contrary, exert just the opposite tendency. Communities that send a very large part of their population into schools have a higher ideal as to what is considered lawful and decent behavior in public. They are not content with punishing crimes against person and property, but often arrest persons for drunkenness and other vices. There was a time in Boston when a person seen in the streets smoking a cigar would be liable to arrest by a policeman. A multitude of penalties on the statute books, such as arrest for plucking a flower on the public common or crossing the grass from one gravel walk to another, increase the number of arrests every year, but do not necessarily imply an increase of serious crime. Counting the persons in jail in the United States, it is found that the quota of the illiterate is nearly, or quite

eight times as much as the quota from an equal number of persons who can read and write. For instance, the statistics of the Detroit jail for its first twenty-five years show 40,388 committals, of whom 11,686 could not write. In the total population of the state less than 5 per cent. were illiterates. Five per cent., therefore, furnished 11,686 committals and the other 95 per cent. of the population furnished 28,652. In other words, the illiterates furnish eight times their quota of criminals for the jail. The report of the Detroit jail for 1887 contains the statistics on this subject.

"How about the statement of Mrs. Davis that the number of juvenile offenders in London was greatly increased after the establishment of the London free school in 1870?"

"I have before me," replied Commissioner Harris, "two articles on this subject, one in the *London School Board Chronicle* for April 16, 1898, and the other in the *London Schoolmaster*, for November 6, 1897. The average daily number of persons in the jail in England and Wales are given for thirty-four years and a study of them will reveal the true facts regarding the point touched on by Mrs. Davis. There was a marked decrease of crime from 1870 to 1894. The schools had scarce begun to have any effect upon the total in 1870, but in that year there were 128 persons in jail out of every 100,000 of the population. Ten years later the 128 had decreased to 111 in each 100,000 population and in 1890 this had fallen off nearly one half. Instead of 111 there was only 68 in prison out of a population of 100,000. It has been stated that the school educates the intellect, but does not affect the morals. Nearly all the schools of this country and in England lay more stress on good behavior than they do upon learning lessons. In fact, some schools with poor methods of instruction in spite of that do a great deal of good, because they teach children how to behave in public. By insisting on regularity, punctuality, silence, and industry in the schoolroom they secure a quality of self-control on the part of the pupils which no other means can accomplish so well. I do not find it strange, therefore, that the effect of the schools shows itself in the morals of the community still more than it does in the quickening of the intellect. People in England who are studying this matter seem to think that the great falling off of criminals in the jails, namely, from 128 in every 100,000 in 1880 to only 68 in every 100,000 in 1890, is due to the wholesome effect of the schools. Quite extensive investigations were made in 1870 by the Bureau of Education on the same lines. The prisons and jails of seventeen states, fourteen of them being western or middle states, reported 110,538 prisoners. Of these 27,581, or almost exactly 25 per cent. were illiterates. Attention being called to the fact that three fourths of the prisoners could read and write and had had some schooling, the same claim now put forth by Mrs. Davis was made—that education promotes crime. The conclusion was drawn that the schools were 'breeding houses of crime.' But in this case the numerators were compared and the denominators neglected, for in the seventeen states the average illiteracy of the population was about

4 per cent. This four per cent. of the population furnished 25 per cent. of the criminals, and the 96 per cent. who could read and write furnished only 75 per cent. The illiterates, therefore, furnished more than six times their quota, while those who could read and write supplied one fifth less than their proper quota. Thus, 1000 illiterates furnished on an average eight times as many prisoners as the same number who could read and write. It seems to me that if the discipline of a common school which trains the pupil from day to day in the habit of self-control and respect for the rights of others, will not produce law abiding citizens nothing else is likely to accomplish it."

"What would be the effect of school training on other evil habits outside of the list of schoolroom virtues — regularity, punctuality, silence, etc.?"

"The school impresses upon the pupil the constant necessity of considering the ideal of good behavior, and the boy in school for many months in the year acquires this as a habit; it becomes second nature. Of course a person who has acquired the habit of regulating his conduct by an ideal must carry this habit into the whole range of his life and modify it to some advantage. Education is far from stimulating evil instincts, but on the contrary serves to suppress them. One of the English writers, to whom I referred, collected the police statistics as well as the jail statistics, and found that in 1870, while there were 31,225 thieves in jail there were 50,144 running at large, but known to be thieves by the police. These two items make a total of 81,369, but in 1895 those in jail had decreased from 31,225 to 18,365, and those reported as at large had decreased to 18,033, making a total of 36,398 in 1895, as against 81,369 in 1870. In the meantime the population of England and Wales had increased from 23 millions to 30 millions. This reduction by one half of the number of suspicious cases and in jail in the face of a big increase in population is certainly an indication of the good effects of education. These statistics are of value because they show the state of the whole community and not merely the number actually convicted and imprisoned. An interesting record has been made in Massachusetts regarding the relation of the jail population to illiteracy. Massachusetts gives more years of schooling, on an average, to its population than any other state. It has been claimed that Massachusetts overeducates its children. I have heard this charge, but you have only to consider the average amount of schooling to each inhabitant in order to see that the state does not overdo the matter of education. Massachusetts gives about seven years of two hundred days each, on an average, to each one of its pupils, but the average for the whole United States is only five years. The average is not enough to take the pupil through the course of study in the ordinary district school. In 1850 there were 8761 persons in the jails and prisons of Massachusetts, while in 1885 the number had increased to 26,651, nearly three times as many as in 1850. This occasioned the remark that with the increase in education crime increased in a still greater degree. An analysis of the crimes reported, however, showed that those against person and property had decreased during

that period. Serious crimes had decreased 40 per cent., while the offenses against order and decency, being more vigilantly prosecuted, produced the enormous increase in the total number. For example, in 1850 there were 3341 commitments for drunkenness, but in 1885 there were 18,701 commitments for this offense. The commitments for all other crimes than drunkenness in 1850 amounted to one for each 183 inhabitants, and in 1885 one to each 244 inhabitants. This showing turned the tables on that class of sensational writers who deal with hysterical statistics. Person and property have become more safe in Massachusetts in the past fifty years, but drunkenness is more dangerous to the drunkard."

"What do you think of the statement that education gives young people a disgust for manual labor?"

"I do not think that this charge is borne out by statistics. There is no country in the world in which young people are more ambitious to get into occupations in which they can earn a livelihood than the United States. In fact, the hunger for work is too great for the good of our youth. Again, those youths who get the greatest amount of schooling furnish the most productive populations, as, for instance, Massachusetts, with its seven years of schooling for each boy and girl, produces in manufacture, commerce, and agriculture an aggregate of wealth per inhabitant which is nearly twice that of the average product of the nation. In 1880 this product was from 70 to 80 cents per day for each inhabitant, while that for the country at large was only 40 cents. Of course the educated person wishes to save his hands by the employment of machines, and is not so willing to perform mere drudgery by hand when he can see methods of performing it by machines, but in the number of hours that he works per day and in the intensity with which he works he excels the illiterate laborer. A man of education does one day's work at his office and frequently does another day's work when he gets home for the evening. In regard to the declaration that education for women gives them a distaste for marriage with men of moderate means, and, therefore, increases the number of old maids, I can only say that I do not wonder that an educated woman is more particular about the kind of a husband she gets than an illiterate. Then, again, a woman with an academic training can afford to be independent to a certain degree. In closing I would like to quote these words by famous English authorities on the general subject of education and crime. Sir George Kekewich, the head of the parliamentary school board for England and Wales, says: 'Every time I hear of a new school being opened I say to myself, there goes another prison.' Sir John Gorst, one of the parliamentary leaders, says: 'Every pound spent on the education of the young saves many pounds in the increased efficiency of the working population in the absence of the necessity for further jails and work-houses.'"

A. B. A.

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